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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000716

SIPDIS

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LONDON, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

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SUBJECT: DECENTRALIZATION FORUM FOLLOW-UP: UPR'S VIEW

REF: DJIBOUTI 650

Classified By: Pol/Econ Erinn C. Stott for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: In one of several conversations (septels to follow) with the participants of the recent forum held to discuss decentralization and the special status for Djibouti City, Embassy spoke with the president of the newest political party in Djibouti, Union for Reform Partisans (UPR), Ibrahim Chehem Daoud. While the forum was attended by only the parties in the government coalition, and one non-aligned, independent party - UPR, there was a significant and varied debate on several of the articles in the proposed law. Daoud was appreciative of being offered the chance to weigh-in on this law and felt this effort by the government to include the population through political parties was a step in the right direction. End Summary.

12. (C) The July 2-14 Decentralization Forum held in Djibouti was a success, according to one of Djibouti's newest political parties. The forum was organized by the Minister of Interior, who personally invited all political parties to discuss the proposed draft of the Special Statute for Djibouti City. The President of the non-aligned political party Union for Reform Partisans (UPR), Ibrahim Chehem Daoud told Embassy the forum made great progress on the proposed law, and that nearly 50 percent of the draft was changed in some manner.

13. (C) Chehem said there were five main points contested and amended. The first point was the manner in which the Mayor of Djibouti City would be chosen. According to the original draft, the Mayor would be appointed by the President of the Republic. Government aligned parties and non-government aligned parties alike opposed this. Chehem stated the parties agreed it should be amended to have the Mayor of Djibouti City chosen by election.

14. (C) The second contested point was the process of selection of the Mayor of Djibouti. According to Chehem, the final settlement was that selection of the Mayor would be by indirect voting. In the new draft, the citizens of Djibouti City will elect members to the Community Councils. Community Councils will in turn elect the City Council, who will be the elected officials to elect the Mayor of Djibouti City.

15. (C) The third point was naming of Community Councils. Participants opposed the naming of Community Councils and argued that councils should reflect the cultural diversity of the areas they represent. Their preference was to use names that are Somali or Afar, depending on the ethnicity of the district.

16. (C) The fourth point contested was candidate eligibility. For community elections, the government's draft proposed that candidates should only come from registered political parties. Parties participating in the forum held the position that independent candidates should have the right to run in elections. According to Chehem, this was included in the many amendments made by the forum.

17. (C) The final point contested was on control of central administration. Control was originally designed to only be "a priori." Participants in the forum amended this to be "a posteriori" as well.

18. (C) Other amendments included reducing the deposit for community electoral candidates from 350,000 DF (\$1,977) to 250,000 DF (\$1412) to make it easier for poorer political parties to put forward candidates for office. Chehem commented that the Government's attitude towards the participants' requests was good. He added that it was obvious that the current draft was coming directly from the President. Chehem said whenever the participants of the forum suggested a change, the Minister first consulted the President before agreeing. He also said forum discussions indicated that the type of proportionality used for the winner in regional elections (majority winner gets half the seats; other half gets assigned by proportional representation according to votes) be a test for the legislative elections in 2008.

19. (C) Chehem also said the political parties in Djibouti are

in need of training. He said if democracy in Djibouti is to be anything aside from a concept for the rich, all parties must be supported equally by the government. He added that technical assistance is needed, saying he would like to have seminars and tools for his party to learn to operate professionally.

10. (C) Comment: Chehem's UPR is the newest kid on the political block. Created in May this year, Chehem has chosen not to align his party with either the opposition or with the government, even though its stance leans towards the government. UPR's main constituencies are Obock, Tadjourah and Djibouti City. From Chehem's commentary on the forum, it appears the government is sincere in its desire to include all political views in the creation of these important laws. While the opposition has not yet made concrete statements on the law, the parties that did participate in the forum seem to have come away satisfied by the experience. Post will continue to report on the results of the forum as it meets with more of the participants. End Comment.
RAGSDALE